



# Improving the Military's Domestic Crisis Response: *Leveraging the Reserves*

*By Professor Bert B. Tussing, Colonel James F. Roth, WIARNG, and Colonel Richard W. Dillon, USAR (Retired)*

On 11 and 12 July 2006, the U.S. Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership convened a symposium to examine the evolving, and potential role of the military's reserve components in responding to catastrophic incidents in the United States. The fifth of an annual series dedicated to issues surrounding the service reserves and the National Guard, this forum drew heavily from the lessons learned throughout the country's recent history of defense support to civil authorities (DSCA), and particularly from the lessons of Hurricane Katrina. The forum brought together over sixty participants from the service reserve components, the National Guard, U.S. Northern Command (NORTHCOM) and its component commands, the Department of the Army, and others. Among the participants were 10 General Officers and Senior Executive Service members, who joined in receiving the event's recommendations and observations on a "Blue Ribbon Panel" headed by the Honorable Thomas F. Hall, Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs (OSD-RA), and Mr. Frank Jones, Principal Director for Strategic Management, Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Homeland Defense (OSD-HD).

The nexus of the symposium was straightforward: to address the military's role of how to prepare for the *next* domestic crisis, irrespective of its specific nature; how to effectively and efficiently employ the military's reserve component in the Nation's response; and how to better identify the appropriate sourcing, employment, and leveraging of a finite set of resources in the response effort. The principle objective of the symposium was to look beyond the existing roles of the reserve components to *potential* roles and capabilities, and examine how to better leverage those components in responding to "Incidents of National Significance" (INS).

The two day symposium was divided between events designed to "set the stage" and workshops addressing the challenges for the reserve components in domestic response. It began with a "historic perspective" surrounding DSCA, citing events from as early as the administration of George Washington, to modern events as complex and devastating as the Los Angeles Riots, the Oklahoma City bombing and, of course, Hurricanes from Andrew through Katrina. This historic perspective was followed by presentations showing the current direction of the military in preparing for and responding to calls from civil authorities for assistance, as embodied in NORTHCOM's service component commands and the services' reserve components. The different philosophies of these components were highlighted in these presentations, with the U.S. Navy, Marine, Air Force, and Coast Guard reserve standing as basic "supplements" of forces and capabilities applied, as necessary, within their active components; and the U.S. Army, alone, planning for mobilization and employment as "separate units in the fight." How or whether those differences would significantly impact the role of the reserve component's response to domestic emergencies would be examined in the course of the workshops.

The workshops were devoted to four focus areas selected to address urgent topics of concern surrounding the reserve component's contribution to domestic response:

- Advantages and disadvantages of the various Command and Control relationships between the active and reserve components – that have been tried or should be tried – in response to a domestic crisis.
- Means of identifying, promoting and sustaining visibility of RC assets for potential domestic crisis response.
- Means for leveraging the reserve component forces and capabilities for application in response and recovery operations following a major disaster or catastrophic event

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- Recommendations to enhance the military's contribution to Strategic Communication requirements accompanying response and recovery operations.

Separate writings on each focus area will be published as CSL Issue Papers. The following overviews provide a depiction of the tone and direction of each workshop.

## COMMAND AND CONTROL, COOPERATION AND COORDINATION

This workshop group began with the consensus position that the traditional definition of “Command and Control,” a term widely used by the military, is an inappropriate label for civil-military operations in a domestic environment. The purpose of Command and Control (C2) is to ensure Unity of Effort;<sup>1</sup> it is not an end in itself. Accordingly, “command and control” – where appropriate – must be combined with “cooperation and coordination” – where most frequently required – in order to gain that quintessential element of unity of effort in responding to a domestic disaster. This may be intuitive when considering interagency and intergovernmental response, but Unity of Effort is equally important when considering operations involving the active components, their respective reserves, and the states’ National Guard.

Participants pointed to several examples in recent history wherein a “hybrid” C2 organization was established with active duty forces and National Guard troops under the “command” of a National Guard General Officer in order to ensure unity of effort.<sup>2</sup> One of the prime motivations in these arrangements – paying due homage to the sovereignty of the state forces (i.e., the National Guard) as extensions of their “Commanders-in-Chief,” the Governors – will hold true in nearly any domestic response. As the political aftermath of Katrina demonstrated, Governors are no more inclined to surrender the sovereignty of their state’s forces in the face of disaster than in the course of normal affairs.

Stepping beyond this very American regard for federalism, another concern commensurate with the desire for unity of effort has to do with “traditional relationships” between the relatively close-to-home reserve component and their surrounding civil infrastructure (public and private). Throughout the Department of Defense (DoD) there is universal acknowledgement that, in nearly every case, the reserve component (especially the National Guard) will be the military’s “first responders” to disasters—whether those disasters are natural or manmade.<sup>3</sup> This is wholly logical, given the proximity of those forces, the well-hewn relationships they enjoy in their communities, and the knowledge of the community’s infrastructure (and response capability) born of that relationship. Conversely, the lack of such familiarity in state and local environs by federal response agents, to include that most visible agent in uniform, has been identified as one of the greater detractors in their response and recovery preparations and execution. While this does not belie the inherent limitations in the reserve components’ DSCA capabilities, nor the strengths in the active component that can counterbalance those limitations, it does suggest a compelling necessity to bridge the gap of familiarity through a less-centralized, more regionalized military response mechanism. This mechanism, combining the strengths of the active and reserve component, should be understood by all stakeholders – military and civilian alike – and exercised to cement that understanding, rather than allowing catastrophe to be the first examiner.

An accompanying CSL Issue Paper, *Cooperation Before Catastrophe in the Homeland: Designing a Regional Response Mechanism for the Military*,<sup>4</sup> will expand on the recommendations of this segment of the symposium.

## IDENTIFYING RESERVE COMPONENT ASSETS

In spite of the previously cited advantages inherently available to the reserve component, a series of “traditional shortfalls” impacts the effectiveness and efficiency of its commitment in domestic crises. In the July forum, the workshop charged with addressing these shortcomings began from a position that all capabilities required in responding to major disasters and catastrophic events reside, to varying degrees, within the reserve component. However, lack of visibility, ineffective procedures, and other long-standing obstacles hinder the commitment of these forces, either alone or along side their active component counterparts, resulting in suboptimal performance where they are needed most. In order to correct this condition, workshop participants suggested an analytical approach to the issue, consisting of:

1. Determining, by categories, “domestic response operations” whose nature or scope will require a “military” response,
2. Determining specific capabilities required for that response,
3. Determining which of those capabilities can be provided effectively and efficiently from the reserve component, in conjunction with or in lieu of active component response, and

<sup>1</sup> Joint Forces Staff College Publication 1, The Joint Staff Officers Guide.

<sup>2</sup> This “dual-hat” concept was utilized at the G-8 Summit in Sea Island, GA; in support of the Democratic National Convention in Boston; at the Republican National Convention in New York; and during Operation WINTER FREEZE, in Vermont, New Hampshire, and New York.

<sup>3</sup> The heretofore unfathomable exception of a terrorist attack against the U.S. with a weapon of mass destruction, most notably a nuclear device, may be an acknowledged exception to this “rule,” particularly if the military “first responders” are numbered among the victims.

<sup>4</sup> Author: Prof Bert B. Tussing.

4. Ensuring “visibility” of reserve component assets and capabilities to provide for synergy and efficiency in supporting civil authorities.

The domestic response operations categories identified by the participants were kept deliberately broad (e.g., Mass Casualty/Mass Evacuation; WMD Incident Response; Anti-Terrorism/Force Protection Requirements; Consequence Management; etc.) in order to encourage free and open discussion. It should be noted that the capabilities to meet the ensuing requirements were not viewed as being “unique” to the reserve component, or to the military writ large. However, much of the importance of the military response resides in its ability to assess and provide required capabilities quickly and in sufficient amounts to meet demands. Accordingly, this workshop group identified competencies in security, law enforcement, medical response, communications, mortuary affairs, and a host of other areas that could be served from the reserve component. In particular, they noted the inherent military capability to bring to bear logistics and transportation assets that are always in high demand during operations following a disaster. A major challenge acknowledged by workshop participants lies in making all stakeholders aware of these resources and capabilities. This is true even for the other elements of the military’s response – especially those with C2 responsibilities like the Joint Staff, Joint Forces Command, and NORTHCOM – which may be charged with coordinating finite resources against multiple requirements.

## LEVERAGING THE ASSETS OF THE RESERVES

The third workshop group serving the forum dealt with a topic very closely related to the second: once assets are identified and capabilities understood, what are the most efficient mechanisms for ensuring their appropriate employment? This group was asked to look more closely into the current means of activating, deploying, and employing these forces, from the DoD through the spectrum of stakeholders down to the ultimate support envisioned for the local Incident Commander. The group spent some time discussing authorities, responsibilities and processes that are currently involved directly or implicitly in controlling these commitments. They examined the current role, and *desired* role of a number of different entities, to include:

- The Office of the ASD-HD
- The Joint Director of Military Support
- The Service Headquarters
- The National Guard Bureau
- The Office of the Chief, Army Reserve and the U.S. Army Reserve Command
- The service component headquarters of NORTHCOM<sup>5</sup>
- First and Fifth Armies

This workshop group did more than just question the function of these organizations, it tried to identify “gaps, obstacles, and conflicts” affecting the optimum “leveraging” of the Reserve Component for domestic response, and then suggesting the entity best positioned to “fix it.” The forum identified 14 problem areas (and suggested a “problem solver” for each) which included the following:

- Activation policies are not standard throughout the reserve components, nor are the benefits for reservists/Guardsmen once activated. (Fixing agents: ASD-RA, ASD-HD, and NORTHCOM)
- Current policies, especially surrounding mobilization, prevent rapid access to the Services’ Reserve Component. (Fixing agent: ASD-RA)
- A Joint Integrating Concept is required for the Active and Reserve components for DSCA. (Fixing Agent: JDOMS)
- The DoD needs to promulgate implementation guidance for the military’s role in the National Incident Management System (NIMS). (Fixing Agent: ASD-HD)
- A DSCA Education program for appropriate senior officials in state and local government is needed. (Fixing Agent: NORTHCOM)
- Units and resources should be identified to support existing Execute Orders (EXORDS) and Contingency Plans (CONPLANS) (Fixing agents: ASD-RA, ASD-HD, and the Combatant Commanders)

In summation, these two workshop groups reaffirmed the considerable strengths available in the reserve component for response and recovery operations following a disaster or catastrophic event, but also noted that many inhibitors currently exist against the application of those strengths in times of crisis. Their recommendations may serve as a beginning to cure institutional ills that stand in the way of urgent necessity.

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<sup>5</sup> ...or the U.S. Pacific Command or U.S. Southern Command in a domestic response.

## STRATEGIC COMMUNICATIONS IN RESPONSE TO CATASTROPHE

A new reality in the age of mass communication is that a government's responsibility to its people in times of domestic crisis is not measured solely in what it does, but also in how it portrays what it is doing, what it intends to do, and what it is capable of doing. Education and information conveyed prior to a crisis is essential in what is now being called "expectation management." Open and honest communication with a stricken populace at the time of a crisis is key to conveying an understanding as to what is being done to support them, thus providing at once for a calming influence and a sustained confidence in that government.

The last of the symposium's workshops was dedicated to examining how the military, frequently the most visible vestige of the government's response in time of domestic crisis, can serve and enhance the strategic communication facet of the federal, state, and local government efforts. Following a disaster, "news" – legitimate and illegitimate, accurate and innuendo – can come from many sources. Mainstream media may find themselves in competition with bloggers armed with no more than a laptop and an internet service. The government and its military cannot dominate this environment; at best it may hope to manage it.

Towards this "management" participants suggested certain "characteristics of effective strategic communication" that could emanate from the government in general and the military in particular. To begin, the importance of establishing and sharing situational awareness was considered foundational. It is hard to convey confidence when the only ones who seem to have a grasp of the situation are the media networks. As the government conveys its message it must be accurate and consistent; errant reporting is almost expected, but once lost, the credibility of the government is hard to regain. Government officials, including military leadership, should be well-schooled in the ways of the media; conversely, time taken to educate the media in our intentions and our capabilities is never misspent. A "strategic communications plan," generically determined well-ahead of an actual disaster with branches and sequels designed to anticipate contingencies, is likewise time well-spent, and worthy of collaboration through news professionals. Finally, lessons from the battlefield to the home front may transfer well in a domestic crisis: embedded reporters, daily briefings, and a "triage" process to "manage" errant reporting, disinformation and misinformation are all valuable lessons played out daily in Iraq that could have borne fruit in Louisiana. These, and other recommendations and observations came out of discussions in the July forum, and can be examined in greater detail in another CSL Issue Paper, *Strategic Communication in Domestic Disasters: The Military and the Media in an Intergovernmental Environment*.<sup>6</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Recent history and a relentless threat to our people should leave little doubt that our country must be prepared to respond effectively with all available assets to any major disaster and catastrophe before they are upon us. A very real requirement exists for contingency plans every bit as complex and compelling as any held by our combatant commanders. In fulfilling the military's part of this commitment, the reserve component must be a part of the plan and the planning: its forces, capabilities and resources identified and ready; its functions familiar to all stakeholders; its means of command, control, cooperation and coordination identified, understood, and exercised long before stark necessity demands it. The organizers of this symposium hope that its findings may serve as part of a continued forum dedicated to ensuring our country fully leverages all available assets to respond to a crisis.

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<sup>6</sup> Authors: Professor Dennis Murphy and Colonel (Retired) Carol Kerr.

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*This paper and other CSL publications may be found on the USAWC/CSL website at <http://www.carlisle.army.mil/usacsl/IPapers.asp>.*

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